**DOCUMENT RESUME**

ED 072 013 SP 006 065

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| AUTHOR | Mainey, Richard L. |
| TITLE | Preparation of Secondary School Teachers: A Mutual Effort. |
| NOTE | 11p. |
| EDRS PRICE | MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29 |
| DESCRIPTORS | Clinical Professors; Methods Courses; *Preservice Education; Public School Systems; *Secondary School Teachers; *Student Teaching; Teacher Education |

ABSTRACT

The involvement of public school personnel in the education of secondary school teachers was weighed over a period of 4 years in this report. Constructive questions were formulated from interpretation of the data collected. The question of whether university course work should precede public school observation and participation was discussed. It was accepted that both should occur concurrently. It was also accepted that an undergraduate should begin professional participation no earlier than second semester of the sophomore year, and perhaps not until the junior year. The schools or districts involved in this participation should be chosen carefully to insure a maximum benefit for the undergraduate and the public school. The attitudes of the teachers toward the preservice students should also be studied. The question of the establishment of clinical professorships suggested a balanced program for public school and university staffs. A general methods class would be taught in the university; a subject oriented methods class would be taught in the public schools; a student teaching experience would involve both staffs. The conclusion of the report focused on the need for a mutual effort by university and public school staff to identify and assist one another in the solution of problems in secondary school teacher education. (BRB)

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# PREPARATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS: A MUTUAL EFFORT

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SP 006 765

# PREPARATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS: A MUTUAL EFFORT

No one in the field of Teacher Education can be unaware of the current trends toward greater involvement on the part of the public school personnel in the preparation of teachers. No one can argue logically that such involvement is either unnecessary or illogical. One must, however, measure carefully the extent of and types of involvement which will produce the greatest results. It is at this point in which divergent points of view emerge.

For years, teacher preparation courses, including methods courses, have been dismissed as useless, irrelevant. Sadly, these complaints have been all too frequently true. Unfortunately, Educationalists have over-reacted to these complaints. In the mid to late fifties, most state teacher colleges became liberal arts institutions in an attempt to respond to the charges that most Education courses were too "nuts and bolts" oriented. Many critics voiced sentiments along the lines that Education courses, particularly Methods courses, consisted of a series of anecdotes and how-to-do-it statements based solely on the personal experience of the instructor, (which may or may not have been a good one).

An attempt was made in many Schools of Education to respond to these criticisms. Some responded by eliminating Secondary Methods courses. Some responded by ignoring the teacher task aspects of the preparatory program and focusing on the Foundations of Education aspect. This latter condition is reflected in the preponderance of texts designed for use in Methods courses which dealt primarily with historical, philosophical and

sociological issues. Such skills as planning, diagnosing learning problems, dealing with behavior problems, and evaluating were ignored or their importance to teachers minimized.

One result of these, and other factors has been the current cry for certification by performance. Advocates of this approach are critical of the unreality of much of the content of Education courses. An emphasis on teacher tasks is proposed and many of the proponents argue this experience should be provided in the public school classroom by the classroom teacher, retitled clinical professor.

Thus, we have once again the pendulum-like movement in education manifesting itself. One can only hope that we don't again adopt an "either-or" position but rather that we make reality the spiral effect described by Alice Miel.[1] She hypothesizes that the pendulum swings often cited in Education are inept. One should rather view the changes in focus or emphasis as resembling a spiral which expands as it develops. In effect, according to Miel, it isn't really possible for us to move from one position to another without having some aspect of the first position being retained as we move to the second. Translated to teacher preparation, the spiral movement described by Miel suggests that both university course work and public school experience are desirable components of teacher education, and neither is sufficient in itself. But, how do we arrive at the best balance?

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[1]Alice Miel, "Reassessment of the Curriculum-Why?," in Contemporary Thought on Public School Curriculum, eds. Edmund G. Short and George D. Marconnit (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Company, Publishers, 1968), pp. 153-158.

Research is underway in many places designed to determine what teaching is and how we communicate to pre-service teachers those concepts and skills necessary for their future success. Too often, this research ignores what is happening in the schools. For example, it is difficult on Long Island to find a secondary school which is not at least experimenting with non-traditional approaches to teaching. Yet it is equally difficult to find effective materials or procedures which deal with these phenomena. Much has been written about these approaches, such as team teaching, differentiated staffing, individualizing instruction, open-classrooms, and independent study. But, comparatively little is available which helps prepare a future teacher to learn how to function in these different situations. Thus, many teachers find themselves in situations with which they cannot cope. Isn't it logical to ask how they can help a beginner perform in a way that they themselves can't comprehend?

This writer suggests that we need a much more precise definition of teaching - one that takes note of and analyzes the components of non-traditional teaching tasks. Clearly, we must disabuse potential teachers of the notion that teaching is talking and learning is listening - and we must not attempt to make this point in a well-structured lecture. We must also examine the totality of the process of teacher education to determine what can be learned most efficiently in the University classroom and what most efficiently in the public school classroom. Over a four-year period this writer has been struggling with this question. At this point he has

arrived at the position that the public school experience is an indispensable component of the teacher education process. For three semesters, students in this writer's Methods classes (in this last semester, students in all Methods classes) have been required to spend a regularly scheduled period of time working in a public secondary school classroom. Data collected during this period has been analyzed and the tentative interpretations provide more questions than answers. It does seem constructive, nevertheless, to address ourselves to these questions:

1. Which should come first - university course work or public school observation and participation? At this point it appears that the answer is both should occur concurrently. What is needed is a careful structuring of learning experiences which will result in the most efficient and significant transition from the role of student to that of teacher. Before a student should be asked to observe student behavior he should be given some instruction on what to look for, how to look for it and how to evaluate what he sees. Before a student should be asked to tutor, lead a group discussion, teach a group, he should learn how to organize material. Before a student is asked to deal with a problem in the classroom he should be helped to analyze his own perceptions of acceptable behavior. If a Methods course is well structured, the university classroom analysis of a teacher task can be followed up immediately with practical application in the public school classroom.

2. When should an undergraduate begin his professional experiences? No earlier than second semester of the Sophomore year, and perhaps not until the Junior year. The writer is cognizant of the many who argue for direct involvement as early as the Freshman year. However, this position seems to ignore the reality that we are dealing essentially with a "rite of passage." Most freshmen and sophomores are too far removed chronologically from the event of becoming a teacher to make the transition demanded of them. In fact, some juniors and seniors are still so immature that they have difficulty assuming the role of teacher and a few are incapable of doing it. Since many education majors performed such tasks as tutoring and working as student aides when they were in high school, the impact of working as a teacher assistant while enrolled in Methods courses is dissipated because they continue to view themselves as students helping the teacher rather than as pre-service teachers. If in-school programs are to make a difference, the university education major must be forced to act and think as a teacher and not as a student reading about and playing at teaching.

Another issue which is not inconsequential is that most education majors at liberal arts institutions take a severely limited number of credit hours in professional course work.

If, for example, the pre-student teaching component consists of four courses, spreading these courses over a three or four year period doesn't seem to be efficient. The possibility of reinforcing the learning experience given this time lag would probably be greatly decreased.

One must also look at the question of the pre-service teacher's competence vis-a-vis his content area. If one argues that his command of his teaching subject is sufficient to tutor or lead small group discussions when he is a freshman, this writer would ask why then must he take an additional thirty or more credit hours of course work in his content area? Does not such a position substantiate the oft-stated "teachers don't need to know as much (content) as someone who is really going to work?"

3. Which schools or districts should be involved? Having spent two fruitless years attempting to gain the support and involvement of a number of districts, this writer is convinced that university personnel should look carefully at which districts they approach and which they will work with in such a cooperative venture. Rightfully, the public school personnel are primarily concerned with the education of the students entrusted to them; equally rightfully, the university should be primarily concerned with the students with whom they have contracted to educate. This does not

mean, however, that this difference in priorities must or even may present conflict. It does mean that the personnel from the two institutions must be aware of and sensitive to each other's needs.

Another factor in selection of school districts to be considered is the attitude of teachers towards students. While acknowledging that negative experiences can produce significant learnings, one must also recognize the danger that an inexperienced teacher candidate may not perceive a negative experience as bad and may have inaccurate perceptions of good teaching reinforced. A sensitive individual may observe the deleterious effect on a high school student of an inept teacher's physical or emotional abuse, but a less sensitive candidate may have his insensitivity toward other human beings reinforced. Had that same young university student been placed to work with a student-oriented teacher his perception of effective student-teacher communication might be positively redirected.

Further, care should be made that university preservice teachers are not placed with teachers who are insecure in their teaching. Assessment of many so-called innovations has shown that frequently the major cause of "failure" is that the teachers didn't have adequate preparation to perform in the new situation. Placing a teacher candidate

with a teacher in an individualized program who doesn't understand the new role such a teacher should assume can be disastrous. This writer believes that the myth of equating willingness to accept an innovation with youth should be placed to rest. A university student, faced with twelve plus years of traditional teaching will probably be just as fearful of the unknown as any practicing teacher who is equally ignorant of the new. When the reluctant university student is matched with the insecure classroom teacher the result may well be that the university student will learn that the innovation cannot work. Here again, the university staff can attempt to deal with many aspects of this problem in the university classroom. Surprisingly, undergraduates this semester were well along into the course before many of them realized that they were working from learning packets in a methods course. Also, it was some time before they realized the course was structured to accommodate individual differences. Once these realizations were arrived at, they became most articulate in assessing the individualized programs they were working with in the public school classrooms.

4. How much time should the university student spend in the public school? This is a difficult and complex question to answer. When the all-university approach to teacher

education is used, many students have real difficulty in finding blocks of time in their schedules. This writer believes, however, that the serious student, using the resourcefulness that all serious students use in so many other ways, will find the time to participate. We required a two hour block of time one day a week as minimum. Many students resisted strenuously, complaining they didn't have that much time available. Ironically, in the evaluations of the in-school experience, the most frequently voiced complaint by our students was that they didn't spend enough time in the schools and suggested a twice a week, or more, time element. Perhaps the major factor is the public school teachers' ability to make the university students' experience significant no matter what restrictions time might present.

5. Should clinical professorships be established? Again, this is not an easy question to answer. The master teacher of students is not necessarily the master teacher of teachers. Also, if the university student worked with the clinical professor in his public school classroom and in his university seminars, he may get a very limited perspective of the field. Perhaps one solution may be to have a general methods type class taught by university staff, a subject area oriented methods class taught in the

public schools by clinical professors chosen from the staff of that school, and a student teaching experience involving the staffs of both levels. Such a balance, hopefully, would reduce the parochialism that might result from using exclusively the staff of the public school and the "theoretical" thrust which might result from the singular use of the university staff.

We have made a beginning. We have identified, with the very substantial assistance of the public school personnel, many problems. We have resolved some, but are still struggling with many. Of one thing we are convinced: we must work together to face our mutual problems or we will never arrive at intelligent solutions to them.